THE POWER OF ONE

2015 Annual Report
Dear Friends,

As we celebrate our 20th anniversary and reflect on 2015, I am proud of PIRC’s history of advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable immigrants in need, individuals who have nowhere else to turn and who need help in seeking the protections of our laws. These individuals include asylum-seekers like Fadima and survivors of violence like Gabriela’s mom. Often it has been the power of one advocate or one volunteer or one courageous voice that makes all the difference in turning despair into hope. Together, we have been creating the possibility of hope for so many for the past 20 years.

The year 2015 was marked with many accomplishments and a few shortfalls. PIRC served more than 1,900 immigrants in detention, and 177 immigrant survivors in the community. PIRC also collaborated with other service providers to share ideas and resources and educate the community so that more immigrants could access services in a meaningful, impactful way. Further, while we closed the calendar year with more expenses than funding, our mission and work were bolstered by the hiring of a part-time development manager and an additional attorney. These changes in PIRC’s staff are positioning PIRC to provide additional services in our detention programs and to continue building organizational sustainability, working on both the needs of today and the needs of tomorrow.

We could not do what we do without the volunteers, funders, donors, and supporters who have been with us every step of the way in our history. For the past 20 years, PIRC has been focused on the mission of ensuring access to vulnerable immigrants. With the help of our friends and supporters, we will continue to do as in the coming year and reach our goals of creating hope for more individuals like Fadima and Gabriela’s mom. If you are not currently engaged with PIRC’s work through a donation of your time, talent or financial resources, I urge you to go to our website and learn more about all that we do. The power of one person, one idea, one action can transform lives.

Kind regards,
Andrew Mahon, Board President

Throughout our annual report, you will read stories of the incredible people who make this work possible. PIRC and our services have been built by the power of one. Over the years, it has been one individual or one group that has had the courage and determination to stand up for justice and take action where injustice was seen. Each day we see how the power of one courageous voice can truly change lives, and how the power of one partnership can open doors to possibilities which before never existed. As PIRC marks its 20th anniversary, we hope to continue building on this power as we grow our programs and transform more lives.

The PIRC Mission: PIRC was founded in 1996 on the principles of service and access to justice in response to the detention of the refugees of the Golden Venture. Our principles guide PIRC’s programs, protecting immigrants’ rights to freedom and opportunity in the United States, giving voice to the most vulnerable immigrants and their families. PIRC provides free, effective legal representation, legal services, education and advocacy to help immigrants obtain or protect their legal status.

PIRC 2015 Board of Directors
Andrew Mahon, Esq. (President) Law Office of Troy Mattes
Russel Wert (Vice President) Edward Jones
Richelle Hamberger, CPA (Treasurer) Hamberger and Company, LLC

PIRC 2015 Board left to right: Andy Mahon (President), Russ Wert (Vice President), Angus Love, Clasina Houtman (Secretary), Leanne Miller, Laura Smith, Mary Studzinski (Executive Director). Absent: Laura Smith and Richelle Hamberger (Treasurer)

PIRC Mission: “PIRC has completely transformed since we set it up in 1996. It has gone from a shoestring operation with no paid staff to a highly effective legal services and advocacy entity.”
– Jeffrey Lobach, co-founder of PIRC, managing partner at Barley Snyder Attorneys at Law

To Change Lives

The Power of One…
In 2010, Fadima* was attending school in Somalia when her father, a commander with the clan-based terrorist group al-Shabaab, sent two representatives to her home, where they told her that she needed to come with them. They told her she was to be the amir’s 4th wife. She didn’t know the amir, but her mother also pleaded and protested. She and Fadima were thrown into a mirror, which shattered and badly cut both Fadima and her mother. The two men said that they didn’t want to bring her to the amir in that condition and instructed her to clean herself up and that they would return. Fadima and her mother left town the same night, going in different directions. Fadima fled to Ethiopia and eventually found her way to the U.S.

Because Fadima had no documents to enter the U.S., she was sent to York County Prison and placed into removal or deportation proceedings. A PIRC staff attorney met with Fadima and listened to her story, providing her with a legal orientation in detention to mount their own defense by providing:

- Classes: PIRC attorneys provide education specifically designed to educate individuals about their rights, what to expect in court, and about their potential for legal remedies. In 2015, PIRC provided services to over 1,600 detained immigrants at the York County Prison and over 300 family members at the Berks County Residential Center.
- Pro Se Assistance: PIRC attorneys, interns, and volunteers help immigrants in detention with research, translation, and legal materials, allowing them to include more evidence to support their cases. There are between 600-800 immigrants detained in the York County Prison on any given day, and 82-92 family members at the family detention center in Berks County (Berks County Residential Center). Immigrants facing removal who fear being returned to their home country face numerous barriers: language, limited understanding of U.S. immigration laws, isolation, and little understanding of their rights. The services provided by the LOP are in most cases the only assistance individuals will receive before their immigration hearing. PIRC provides services to immigrants in detention with free legal representation. The power of an advocate through this process cannot be understated.
- Advocacy: PIRC has provided services in the Berks County Residential Center for more than a decade. As the needs of the individuals in this detention center have changed over the years, PIRC has structured services differently in response. In 2015, PIRC collaborated with HIAS Philadelphia, the AILA Philadelphia Chapter, Human Rights First, and the ACLU to coordinate pro bono representation, legal assistance, advocacy, and post-release services, when possible.

PIRC helps immigrants to help themselves. PIRC is the only service provider in the nation to offer Pro Se Assistance, Pro Bono Representation, and Advocacy to immigrants held in civil detention who are waiting for their deportation hearing. PIRC’s LOP informs and assists individuals in detention to mount their own defense by providing:

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PIRC is the voice for the most vulnerable. Through the VulnerablePersons in Detention Program, PIRC attorneys represent individuals who have mental health challenges, who are isolated, and who have fled trauma, torture and persecution in their home country. All are seeking safety from harm in the United States and need an attorney to advocate for them before an immigration judge. In 2015, PIRC provided 37 immigrants in detention with free legal representation. The power of an advocate through this process cannot be understated.

Nationally, only about 14 percent of detained immigrants are able to secure legal representation, and only 2 percent who can secure legal representation are able to find it for free*. The rest go it alone.

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"PIRC saves lives. And does so over and over. ... The lives saved by PIRC include adults and children who face torture in their homelands, victims of sexual abuse and assault, and those fleeing unimaginable violence."
— Shoba Wadhia, director for Penn State Law Center for Immigrants’ Rights, professor

PIRC first met Gabriela* and her mom and siblings when she was living in a home filled with violence. Gabriela and her brother and sister were born in the U.S., but their mom was undocumented. Gabriela’s mom came to the U.S. when she was 13 months old and grew up as an undocumented child. After high school, she married a U.S. citizen. Shortly after they were married, Gabriela’s father began beating her mother and calling her names. He promised to file immigration papers for her mother but he never did. He told Gabriela’s mom that if she went to the police, he would have her deported—and she would never see her children again.

Gabriela’s father used her mother’s lack of immigration status to control her and isolate her. For many years, Gabriela’s mom thought she had no choice. One day in desperation, she told a friend about the violence she was experiencing and that she felt frightened and trapped because of her undocumented status. Her friend told her to call PIRC.

Under existing American laws designed to help victims of domestic violence, PIRC helped Gabriela’s mom connect with victim services and help her get a work card and then a green card. PIRC legal staff helped Gabriela’s mom and children leave a life of violence and threats and find a life of safety and hope.

The Immigrant Survivors Project serves immigrant survivors in nine counties in south central Pennsylvania and is the only provider in the region providing these services. In 2015, the ISP provided free immigration legal services to 177 survivors in our community.

* Name has been changed to protect identity.
CARES. Sergei* was a gay asylum-seeker detained at the York County Prison, and had come to the U.S. from Russia in the wake of attacks stemming from recently passed anti-gay legislation.

Despite his inability to get documents from his time in Russia, Sergei settled into life in the U.S. and worked hard to get his resettlement plan underway. Not only did CARES win asylum for Sergei, but they arranged for a detailed assessment of the trauma that their client experienced. Attendees learned how to develop forensic evaluations and reports to document the trauma experienced by asylum-seekers. Many of these attendees have since gone on to work as forensic assessors and have implemented their own trauma-informed care practices.

In the community, PIRC advocates for language access by providing education and training for service providers, providing them with tools to bridge the language and cultural gaps that may exist with the immigrants they serve.

In PIRC’s work, language access takes many forms: the interpreter who is the voice of an asylum-seeker or of an immigrant victim of violence when speaking to a PIRC attorney, the volunteer who translates important documents into English; the legal materials that are distributed in dozens of languages so immigrants can understand their rights and legal options; and the direct communication that takes place between a bilingual PIRC staff person and the traumatized person they are serving.

Access to justice cannot happen if an asylum-seeker or immigrant survivor cannot communicate with the advocate and service provider who want to help or cannot communicate with law enforcement or government officials with whom they interact. Language access is necessary if individuals who do not speak English well are to understand their complicated legal case. Language access means a PIRC staff or volunteer attorney can understand the details of trauma and violence when they listen to a survivor’s story, an immigrant survivor can understand critical information about their rights and options under existing law, and service providers and law enforcement agencies will use qualified interpreters and not permit abusers or family members to serve as interpreters.

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A difference-maker in accessing justice: language access

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Celebrating Each Volunteer

In June 2016, PIRC hosted its fifth annual Light of Liberty Awards Reception, honoring the many volunteers and supporters who provided assistance in 2015 and awarding individuals who went above and beyond to make access to justice possible for those who need it most. As we celebrated our 20th anniversary, we welcomed former PIRC executive director Kristen Uhler-McKeown as the 2016 Light of Liberty keynote speaker, who spoke not only of the importance of PIRC’s work, but about how much we have accomplished. We couldn’t have come this far without the incredible time, talent, and support provided by the amazing volunteers and supporters who have truly transformed lives.

Volunteer Spotlight:

Over the past few years, David Freedman, a partner attorney at Barley Snyder Attorneys at Law in Lancaster, PA, went above and beyond to assist clients and afford them the dignity they deserve. Mr. Freedman has taken on multiple PIRC pro bono cases, including challenging habeus and asylum cases, and in each has worked tirelessly, overcoming challenges to advocate for his clients.

One such example is Rosa*, a young survivor of sexual violence. The trauma Rosa experienced made her feel depressed and suicidal. Adding to the weight of this trauma was the burden Rosa felt knowing that she and her sister and her mom were undocumented and at risk of deportation. Rosa couldn’t remember living anywhere other than the U.S. as she came to the country at a very young age. The U.S. was her home.

Attorney Freedman took on Rosa’s case and worked with her every step of the way. Although Rosa was eligible for a U-Visa, a type of visa for victims of certain crimes, the sexual violence that Rosa experienced occurred years before and had gone unreported, making the option of a U-Visa more challenging. The journey was difficult, but Attorney Freedman did not give up. His hard work and advocacy paid off. He was able to get the evidence he needed so that Rosa, her sister, and her mother could stay. The U.S. was their home. Attorney Freedman’s work gave Rosa and the other clients he has served hope for a new life.

* Name has been changed to protect identity.

The Power of Each Volunteer

Twenty years ago, PIRC was formed by a group of volunteers, and today volunteers fill the same critical functions they did since the start. In 2015, the 50+ volunteers who supported PIRC are truly inspirational individuals who demonstrate the ways in which one person can make real change. Today, volunteers make it possible for vulnerable immigrants to obtain life-changing legal status, win humanitarian relief, and feel safety and hope for the first time in years.

PIRC works with private attorneys and law students to provide legal representation and case assistance to individuals in detention and the community.

• In 2015, private attorneys from York, Dauphin, Lancaster, and Cumberland counties and Philadelphia provided pro bono legal assistance to clients in our Detained and Community Programs.

Volunteers outside the legal community also offer critical services that broaden PIRC’s service reach.

• In 2015, community volunteers provided translation and interpretation assistance, medical and psychological evaluations, and marketing and administration support. The talent and hard work of our volunteers culminated in more individuals receiving services. Through the work of volunteers, vulnerable immigrants:
  • were able to include important evidence in their immigration cases
  • were represented by an attorney who advocated on their behalf
  • were able to tell their stories to an immigration judge

The results of our volunteer work is astounding. Without the support of volunteers, our work would not be possible. Together, we are opening doors for creating new lives for those who need it most.

Volunteer

The Power of One… Volunteer

“Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. … You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

Light of Liberty Award Recipients:

Law Firm: CARES Clinic at Villanova Law Clinic
Detained Programs Pro Bono Attorney: Joseph Hohenstein
Community Programs Pro Bono Attorney: David Freedman
Volunteer Interpreter/Translator: Tesfagiorgis Ghebreslassie
Professional Volunteer: Susanna Francies
Voice of Courage: Mayra Medina
Continuing Commitment to Justice, Organization: York County Bar Foundation/York County Bar Association
Continuing Commitment to Justice, Individual: Charles and Toni Rausch

Pictured: Sarah Martin-Torres, PIRC’s ISP coordinator; Mayra Medina, Light of Liberty award winner; and her children.

Photo © Casey Albright
**The Power of One...**

1996
PIRC is founded by volunteers who work long hours to provide legal representation and know-your-rights presentations to vulnerable immigrants in detention.

2004
PIRC grows from two full-time and one part-time staff to three full-time and one part-time staff.

2006
PIRC begins offering the Legal Orientation Program at the York County Prison, doubling the organization’s capacity for direct services.

2008
PIRC begins Legal Orientation Program services for families held in detention at the Berks family detention center.

2009
Volunteers from the York County community form a working group, the Central Pennsylvania Immigration Project, to provide legal assistance to immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and similar crimes.

**PIRC Through the Years**

2010
The Central Pennsylvania Immigration Project becomes a program of PIRC, serving York and Adams counties.

2012
PIRC hosts the first Light of Liberty Awards Reception to honor the transformative work of our volunteers.

2013
PIRC expands services to immigrant survivors in nine counties in south central Pennsylvania: Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry, York.

2015
PIRC joins forces with other nonprofits to form the Berks Pro Bono Collaborative to increase the assistance provided for families held in immigration detention.

2015
PIRC volunteers provide $236,000 worth of life-transforming services to vulnerable immigrants.

2016
PIRC staff grows to 10.

Today
PIRC has provided legal orientation services to over 15,000 detained immigrants awaiting their immigration hearing.

Since 2010, PIRC has served more than 300 immigrant survivors as well as their immigrant and U.S. citizen children, obtaining immigration status and creating lives of safety.

In 2016, the Central Pennsylvania Immigration Project was renamed the Immigrant Survivors Project, reflecting the work we do and the admiration we hold for the immigrants who survive violence and have the resiliency to build new lives of hope and opportunity.

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In 2015, PIRC focused resources on program services, devoting 92 percent of expenses to serving vulnerable immigrants. PIRC leveraged an additional $236,725 of in-kind services from attorneys, interpreters, translators, and other volunteers to provide additional critical services.

We are truly grateful for the support from our community. The support PIRC received from the donors and funders in 2015 made it possible for programs to continue and grow, and more importantly, for vulnerable immigrants to access life-transforming services. Every contribution makes an impact, ensuring access to justice and giving hope... one individual at a time.

Individual Donors

Anonymous
Oscar Barbosa
Lynne Brown
Wendy Chan
Scott and Stephanie Duques
Angela Edna
Diane Elderkin
Jill Family and Nicholas Stepp
Rosanna Felix
William Gierasch
Judith Marie Gilroy
Clasina Houtman
Ida Lamberti
Cindy and Jeff Lobach
Angus Love
Anna Magallanes
Andrew Malson
Tony Matthews
Joseph McDavitt
Elizabeth Miller
Thomas and Jill Miller
Todd and Leslie Platts
Jayesh Rathod
Charles and Toni Rausch
Henry Rhoads
Joseph and Rosemari Sallens
Daniel Schwarz
Craig Shemetka
Pierre Thompson
Justin Tormey
Craig Trebilcock and Family
John Uhler and Susan Uhler
James Wade
Frank Weaver
Kenneth Worrhaar

Revenue

Public / Government Funding $396,327
Foundations / IOLTA $178,613
Individual Contributions $15,020
Other Revenue $7,089

Expenses

Funding $30,250
Operations / Administration $32,110
Program Services $572,643

A York County Bar Foundation (YCBF)-funded economic impact study completed in 2014 measured the impact of YCBF-funded legal services programs, including PIRC’s legal programs. The study showed that investing in the legal service programs produces a significant economic impact within the community, yielding an economic return of nine dollars for every dollar invested.

Donations and financial support helped families like Jenny and her daughters start a new life.

The Power of One...

Donations and financial support create impact, benefiting the community economically and creating safety and opportunity for immigrant survivors and their children.

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Private Foundations, Corporations, and Other Organizations:

AILA Philadelphia
Barley Snyder, Attorneys at Law
Glafkefiller Insurance
Herbert M. Rahmeyer Trust
Holberg Design Inc.
Pennsylvania IOIOTA Board
Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia
Law Foundation of Berks County
Mennonite Central Committee
Philadelphia Bar Foundation
Round Hill Presbyterian Church
William and Mildred Kaplan Foundation
York County Bar Association
York County Bar Foundation
2015 PIRC Staff

Mary Studzinski, Executive Director
Matthew Lamberti, Managing Attorney
Selby Abraham, Staff Attorney
Ryan Brunsink, Staff Attorney
Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Staff Attorney
Michelle Diaz, Paralegal

Detained Programs

Matthew Lamberti, Managing Attorney
Selby Abraham, Staff Attorney
Ryan Brunsink, Staff Attorney
Tamara Shehadeh-Cope, Staff Attorney
Michelle Diaz, Paralegal

Community Programs

Diana Locke, Managing Attorney
Sarah Martin-Torres, ISP Coordinator
Nadina Feakins, Legal Advocate

Development/Administration

Elizabeth Miller, Development Manager/Office Manager
Angelica Ramos, Office Assistant

2015 PIRC Volunteers

We cannot express enough the admiration we have for the volunteers in our communities who stepped forward to lend their time and talent to individuals who need it most. Again and again, the work of our volunteers produced incredible results. From each document translated to each challenging case taken on, the power of one individual to change lives was made clear. We are extremely grateful to work alongside you to ensure access to justice and transform lives.

Amin Alawi
Bertrand Alcide
Michelle Bobadilla-Vidal
J. Alex Brophy
CARES Clinic - Villanova Law
Johelys Cecela
Wendy Chan
Daniel Conklin
Susana Cortina de Canals
Eugene Creany
Michelle Diaz
Carol Anne Donohoe
Eliza Donohue
Judy Eidelson
Rosanna Felix
Susanna Francies
David Freedman
Conchita Garcia

Tesfagiorgis Ghebreslassie
Brennan Giangrasso
Patricia Gready
Suzan Greenberg
Gabriela Grezina
Rosalyn Groff
Richelle Hamberger
Elizabeth Hoffman
Joseph Hohenstein
Ben Hooper
Clasina Houtman
Katelyn Hufe
Kaley Keener
Bob Lefevre
Laura Lopez Ledesma
Angus Love
Andrew Mahon
Mayra Medina

Ryan Meunnich
Leanne Miller
Rebecca Munschker
Tatiana Pakula
Christina Powers
Morgan Reed
Tamara Shehadeh-Cope
Laura Smith
Suzanne Smith
Ed Spreha
Robert Stein
Justin Tomevi
Arno Vosk
Russel Wert
Laurie Wiest
Elliot Young